

Memphis VA hospital ranked among the worst in the country — again

[Brett Kelman](#), [Memphis Commercial Appeal](#) Published 12:06 p.m. CT Oct. 3, 2018 | Updated 4:03 p.m. CT Oct. 3, 2018

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The closing statement from Bill Lee at the governor debate in Memphis



(Photo: USA TODAY)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The annual VA rankings show the Memphis medical center received a 1-star rating for the third year.
- The hospitals in Nashville and Murfreesboro improved and are now ranked with 2 stars.
- The VA hospital in Mountain Home remains a 4-star facility.

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The Memphis VA Medical Center has once again been listed among the worst veteran's hospitals in the country, at least in part because of the alarming amount of medical complications and death that occur within its walls.

The Memphis hospital is one of only five veteran's hospitals across the nation that have received a one-star rating three years in a row, according to new rankings released by the VA on Wednesday.

New VA rankings: [Five hospitals get lowest one-star rating for third year](#)

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The rankings show that the Memphis facility has made "small improvements," but it remains one of the most persistently troubled facilities in the system.

VA records show that Memphis received its low rating because of uncommonly high levels of patient death and medical complications, including bloodstream infections and staph infections.

In a written statement responding to the new rankings, Medical Center Director David Dunning said the hospital was making "significant improvements."

Dunning said the hospital was "among the faster improving medical centers" in the country. At least 29 other VA hospitals made larger improvements, according to the rating system.

"Some of our biggest strides were in the areas of mental health, including suicide prevention, hospital complications and sepsis recognition," Dunning said in the statement. "Our staff are fully engaged in improving our Veterans' experience and our hospital is far safer in every aspect than we were one, two or three years ago."

Memphis' low ranking comes about a year after a USA TODAY investigation into the hospital [revealed a series of botched surgeries inside the facility](#), including a patient who mistakenly had 10 inches of packaging tubing implanted into an artery in his leg, ultimately forcing an amputation.

Exclusive: [Botched surgery, delayed diagnosis at a one-star 'house of horrors' VA hospital](#)

VA officials said at the time that a new director had taken over the Memphis facility, then quickly identified problems in the surgery, research, nursing, engineering and human resources departments.

"When we determine facilities need extra attention — such as those in Memphis and Marion, Ill. — they are receiving it," said Curt Cashour, a spokesman for the VA system, last year. "And we are not hesitating to take swift accountability actions when warranted."

U.S. Rep Steve Cohen released a statement after the report was released, expressing his "extreme disappointment."

"Memphis veterans deserve better than this. My office continues to receive complaints about the poor performance of our VA facility and today's report indicates it is still mired at the bottom of the national rankings," Cohen said. "It is unconscionable that the rate of death is so high."

The congressman said he wrote VA Secretary Robert Wilkie Wednesday afternoon, asking that needed improvements be made immediately.

Other Tennessee VA hospitals fared better in the new rankings. Facilities in Nashville and Murfreesboro made enough improvements to be upgraded from one-star to two-star ratings. The Mountain Home VA remains a four-star facility.

The VA regularly scores 146 of its medical centers based on dozens of quality factors, including death, infection rates and wait times, but used to keep these rankings secret.

The agency did not start releasing the ratings until USA TODAY obtained and published them for the first time in 2016. The VA then committed to posting them annually.

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